True Stuff This Way: An introduction Write Around Portland's spring 2010 anthology, *The Top*
by Margaret Malone

Write Around Portland Volunteer Workshop Facilitator Margaret Malone's writing has appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *Swink*, *latimes.com, The 2008 Wordstock Ten* and elsewhere. She was awarded Literary Arts' 2009 Oregon Literary Fellowship for fiction. Margaret has been a volunteer and workshop facilitator with Write Around Portland since 2006 and is currently at work on a collection of stories and a memoir.

Most of what I know about myself, the true stuff, I know because of writing. Out from my brain, to my heart, down my arm, through the pen and onto paper. Even when I am writing fiction, the most beautiful license to lie, even then, I will look down at what I've written and there it is, the truth again.

It is not exaggeration to say there is not much I understand about myself or the world until it makes that journey from my brain through my heart down my arm and onto paper.

I am not the only one.

When I heard about *Write Around Portland* five years ago, I felt sure that the organization was born because somebody else out there wanted to share that same feeling with other people. And I wanted in. I wanted to help someone new to writing know that feeling too—to understand the world, to learn what is true about ourselves.

I signed up to volunteer and the next available gig was an anthology reading.

If I'm not mistaken, I was stationed at the snack food table in the back of the room. I stood there with my name badge around my neck and hovered over the vanilla crème cookies and baby carrots. I felt ineffectual—why am I even here? Who am I helping?

Then the reading started.

People, all different kinds of people, walked up to the microphone to read their work. One reader was so nervous the anthology shook in her hands as she read. Another reader, a man with a quiet voice, forgot to say his name or his page number or the title of his poem. All of us in the audience, we listened. Some of the readings were funny, some were sad. Each of them, everyone, seemed impossibly brave.

Fiction or memory. Poem or prose. It was obvious that each reader, each writer in the anthology was trying to find and bare the true stuff. It knocked me out. Standing behind the snack table, my whole body listening, that's the moment when I knew that I'd do anything I could for *Write Around Portland*.

Even now, five years later, each time I facilitate a workshop or attend a reading, the same magic happens - people sharing themselves, people listening.

It is risky business to bare yourself to a room full of strangers. In *Write Around Portland*, the participants do it every week. Again and again. Outloud. On the page.

Listen, their words say. Here is something awkward or scary or heart-breaking. And then, this other amazing thing happens –that awkward or scary or heart-breaking thing that one person shares is understood: it reminds a reader or a listener of his own true stuff. Maybe for a moment, the world makes sense.

So as you flip through these pages, think of everything that came before. What you are about to read has travelled a long way to get here. A life lived, grief and joy and risk. All of this has journeyed out the brain, to the heart, down the arm, through the pen and onto paper. Listen. True stuff this way. Turn the page.

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